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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000233

SIPDIS
FOR DRL AND NEA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2035/02/23
TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM KIRF SOCI EG
SUBJECT: A/S POSNER ENGAGES WITH GOE, ACTIVISTS ON NAGA HAMADI KILLINGS

REF: 10 CAIRO 163; 10 CAIRO 153; 10 CAIRO 141; 10 CAIRO 59
09 CAIRO 1556

CLASSIFIED BY: Margaret Scobey, Ambassador, State; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. KEY POINTS

-- (C) In January 12-14 meetings, A/S Posner urged the GOE to hold accountable those responsible for the January 6 Naga Hamadi sectarian killings, and to issue additional statements of condemnation.

-- (C) Senior Interior Ministry and MFA officials said the perpetrators would be tried and convicted. They attributed the attacks to Upper Egypt's culture of revenge killings for "honor crimes," such as a November 2009 rape of a Christian girl by a Muslim man.

-- (C) The Legislative Affairs Minister feared a Unified Places of Worship law could exacerbate sectarian tensions. The Minister of Population and Families called for educational reform to promote religious tolerance.

-- (C) Activists criticized the GOE for not preventing the attacks, and for issuing insufficient condemnation.

12. (C) A/S Posner urged GOE officials to hold accountable those responsible for the January 6 sectarian killings in order to break the cycle of sectarian violence (ref D). He stressed the importance of credible prosecutions, and urged the GOE to issue additional public statements condemning the attacks.

MOI and MFA Stress "Vendetta Culture"

13. (C) Interior Ministry State Security Director Rahman said residents of Upper Egypt are "limited in their culture and education," and often react violently to what they perceive as "honor crimes," such as the November rape of a Christian girl by a Muslim man in the Upper Egyptian town of Farshout. He asserted

that in response to "honor crimes," there are often attacks in Upper Egypt, but the violence only attracts attention when Muslims target Christians. He said that feuds and vendettas between families can continue for generations.

¶4. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Wafaa Bassim said that Upper Egyptians maintain a tradition of revenge killings, and that the January 6 shootings were a response to the Farshoot rape. She said the GOE would try and convict the Naga Hamadi perpetrators. Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Wael Aboulmagd said that the People's Assembly and the quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights would send fact-finding missions to Naga Hamadi.

Minister Shehab Pessimistic about Legislative Solution

¶5. (C) Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Shehab said the GOE needs to punish the perpetrators. He contended that the Interior

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Ministry is conducting a serious investigation. Shehab said that Egyptian Muslims and Copts have lived together for many years, and he hoped that peaceful coexistence would resume.

¶6. (C) Minister Shehab said that a Unified Places of Worship Law would not be a "magic solution" to sectarian tensions. Shehab asserted that although he personally favors passing such a law, it would have a negative effect on Muslim-Christian relations. He contended that Christians would protest any GOE rejections of church building requests, and Muslims would react badly to GOE approvals. Shehab opined that President Mubarak's immediate approval of four to five church building requests would send "the right signal" following the Naga Hamadi killings.

Minister Khattab: Education is the Answer

¶7. (C) Minister of Population and Families Mushira Khattab underscored that civic education in schools stressing Egyptian identity over religious faith is needed to combat hate speech and intolerance. She noted her ministry plans to send the Prime Minister such an education proposal, as the issue affects families. Khattab said the GOE has previously promoted reconciliation, and then assured the public that "everything is ok." She called for consistent action to promote religious tolerance. Regarding identification documents, she opined that the GOE should allow identification documents for Bahai'is to state "Baha'i" in the religion field, or order dashes in this field for all Egyptians. (Note: Per ref E, following a January 2008 court decision, the GOE has begun issuing identity documents for Bahai'is with a dash in the religion field. Previously, the GOE would only issue documents stating the bearer's identity as Muslim, Christian or Jewish. End note.)

Civil Society Reactions

¶ 8. (C) Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights Executive Director Hossam Bahgat said the GOE failed to prevent a predictable attack. He asserted that the GOE should have been aware of rising sectarian tensions in the Naga Hamadi area over the previous two months. He attributed sectarian violence to a culture of impunity resulting from a lack of convictions in recent years. Bahgat called for improvements in the educational system to promote a culture of tolerance.

¶ 9. (C) Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies Director-General Bahey Al-Din Hassan said he expects "exponentially increasing" sectarian violence as the GOE did not hold anyone accountable for violence against Copts in 2009. He criticized the GOE for not acknowledging the killings as sectarian. Afro-Egyptian Human Rights Organization Director Engi Haddad blamed the GOE for not issuing sufficiently strong statements in response to the killings, and asserted the killings illustrated the GOE's inability to protect its citizens.

¶ 10. (U) A/S Posner cleared this message.
SCOBET